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My Only Practical Atonement: Variations of Personality and Performance in the Narrative of Henry Tufts

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Henry Tufts was an effective preacher. According to his autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, Travels and Sufferings of Henry Tufts* (1807), no matter where he preached he successfully moved his audiences. In commenting upon his "sacerdotal office," he stated: "My good fortune . . . was such, that, whether I held forth in public assemblies, or in private families, I generally received the approbation of my auditors, many of whom thought me a saint, and worthy of canonization."[1] Indeed, the first time Parson Tufts preached he established his sainthood by delivering a long, extemporaneous sermon that moved many to tears. The scene took place during the Revolution in Little Falls, Maine. Tufts had just begun his travels as a minister of the gospel and had stopped in the small town to attend the weekday lecture. After the regular minister had finished speaking, Tufts "arose, and, with much outward zeal, addressed the assembly in a speech of considerable length" (110). In response to his sermon, he commented: "the pious parson . . . averred, that I had preached as loud a sermon to his soul, as ever he had witnessed in his life, and that he verily believed I was a heaven born saint" (110).

Not everyone agreed, however. One young woman protested: "He a saint? so is the devil incarnate; for my own part I have no belief in his pretended sanctity, let him profess what he will" (111). Her outburst so astonished everyone, including both ministers, that for several moments all sat in stunned silence. Once the regular minister demanded the reason for her outburst, the woman continued: "I took notice, on his entrance into the meeting, that he first surveyed my face, then my feet, then my whole person, in such a carnal way and manner, that I perceived he had the devil in his heart" (111). Shocked by the woman's accusation, Tufts, despite his rhetorical skills, admitted that he "knew not what to reply" (111). Luckily, he did not need to reply, for the regular minister then rose to defend him, severely reprimanding the woman for daring to accuse a clergyman of immorality. At this rebuke, the woman fled from the meeting, leaving Parson Tufts with his sainthood, although somewhat tarnished, still intact.

This scene is significant for several reasons. The first and most obvious

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reason is that Tufts was not exactly an ordained clergyman. His only claim to the cloth was derived from his ability to imitate the rhetoric of New Light preachers, and his only preparation for the pulpit had been to purchase "a new suit of black, a large Scotch plaid gown, and a cocked up beaver" (110). In fact, by most standards of his day Tufts indeed was more devil than saint. He was primarily a thief, and his narrative was filled with incidents of his breaking into houses and shops throughout New England. After burglary, his next favorite activities were stealing horses, a business that he claimed to have perfected, and practicing medicine, a profession in which he also took great pride. But Tufts, a true citizen of the Early Republic, refused to limit himself to any one role or routine. Embracing the new national ideology of individual sovereignty, he proceeded into whatever direction his self-interest led him, freely exchanging identities as often as he did horses. In addition to preaching, stealing, and healing, he variously appeared as a counterfeiter, an impostor, a swindler, a jailbreaker, a soldier, a deserter, a trapper, a trader, a travelling showman, a speculator, a fortune teller, a wizard, and a gentleman. Moreover, as the young woman from Little Falls correctly conceived, he admired women as much as he did horses, and throughout the narrative he practiced seduction whenever and wherever the opportunity arose. In effect, seduction became merely another form of theft, allowing him to further pose, pretend, disguise, and dissemble.[2] He married three different women simultaneously, fathered two different families, and proposed marriage to a score a women while luring them into bed.

Yet no matter the outrage, Tufts was never ashamed or abashed. Preferring pride over humility, he described his escapades as humorous adventures rather than as odious abominations, and overall he expressed more impenitence than penitence.[3] Instead of confessing his crimes as an act of humiliation, he revealed them because he desired an audience. At one point in the narrative he exclaimed that, of all his endeavors, "the science of deception . . . had ever been my favorite study" (115). He was so adept at this "science" that few recognized how and when they were being deceived, leaving no one to appreciate the full extent of his accomplishments. Above all else, Tufts was a performer, an actor who adopted a variety of roles in the pursuit of both financial and physical reward, and, at some point, he required an audience to acknowledge, if not relish, the cleverness of his performances. Consequently, after he more or less had been forced to retire from iniquity at the age of fifty-nine, he took on the role of a narrator in order to dramatize the sum of his life's performance. When relating his experiences in preaching the gospel, Parson Tufts clearly wanted readers of the Early Republic to enjoy the irony of the sinner posing as a saint.

There was, however, a more significant reason why Tufts paused to describe his first ministerial masquerade. Despite his pious performance, he acknowledged that the young woman's accusation had been "literally

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true"; upon entering the church he had closely surveyed the woman, longing for physical rather than spiritual comfort. Therefore, when she arose to accuse him of being more devil than saint, she had spoken the truth, but her truth was meaningless (and powerless), since her performance was less convincing than his. As a preacher, Tufts had acted out his role so effectively that his audience fully accepted his fiction as fact. Through his rhetoric, he had engaged them imaginatively, seducing them into believing that what was unreal was real. More than just the obvious ironies and hypocrisies, however, this scene demonstrated a basic theme evident in the entire narrative. Truth was variable and contextual, relative to the act of perception. Whatever was "literally true" was not as important as what was perceived, and as Tufts repeatedly proved, perceptions were easy to manipulate.[4]

In order to gain sympathy, narrator Tufts encouraged readers to reject the conventional polarities of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Readers were cautioned not simply to assume that the young woman was right and that the regular minister was wrong. Truth, whether sacred or secular, was never so simple nor so absolute. In describing his experiences, Tufts was a relativist, refusing to limit himself to any one system of meaning or value. As pragmatic as Franklin, he judged according to utility and thus justified his deceptions as being personally useful. In such a subjective world, truth was situational, a matter was of individual choice. Simultaneously, the saint was true for the minister while the devil was true to the woman. Neither view (as the narrator demonstrated) was more real than the other. In an unstable new society, in a world without absolute truth or value, there was no intrinsic difference between sinner and saint. They were, in effect, two sides of the same counterfeit coin. In relating his many outrages, Tufts repeatedly revealed that all beliefs and all judgments similarly rested on false foundations; ultimately, all distinctions were relative to specific contexts. Once the traditional social structures had been challenged through revolution, once the sovereignty of the self had been declared, truth was less real than perceived, and perceptions varied according to the perspectives of time, place, and personality.[5] Moreover, as demonstrated in the small church of Little Falls, Maine, when two conflicting truths collided the one with the best performance gained consensus and thus gained substance.

Without the conventional foundations of either truth or identity, Tufts's provided no obvious hierarchies of meaning; yet readers were not left to stumble around in complete textual anarchy. All the various poses and performances were given structural continuity and coherence through the narrator's voice. From the very beginning, Tufts declared that, in the contest of competing truths, his narrative truth wielded the only authority. In the preface, for example, after declaring that reasons for "secrecy and silence, have ceased to exist" because of his advanced age, he offered truth as compensation for his many deceptions: "I therefore intend, as my only

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practical atonement to those I have injured, to give, with truth and sincerity, a faithful relation of the principal occurrences of my life, in as full and accurate a manner as my papers and recollections will enable me" (vii). Half way through the narrative, he paused to reiterate his fidelity to the truth:

> Desirous of portraying, as an admonition to others, the real picture of my life and manners, in their native original colours; I have advanced thus far, without contracting, or even shadowing a single feature. . . . Wishing still to be influenced by the pencil of truth, I shall proceed in my subsequent delineations with customary frankness. (152)

And finally, in his concluding remarks, the reformed reprobate once more avowed his sacred trust as a narrator:

> I have given, with as much perspicuity and brevity, as was practical . . . a general account of the adventures, travels, sufferings and persecutions, which have attended me, first and last, through the boisterous vicissitudes of life; I have worn no masks, no disguises, but have appeared in my every day dress . . . whoso shall read these pages will know my real character, as well as a long personal acquaintance. . . . Plain truth I adopted as a polar star. (364)

Indeed, as a narrator Tufts needed to stress his strict regard for truth, as his "customary frankness" at times shocked and generally surprised his contemporary readers. In the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness, he had violated the most inviolate of spaces and relationships without the slightest remorse. In the midst of such trespasses, Tufts correctly judged that his readers, unwilling to believe the audacity of his outrages, needed to be reassured that he wrote with "the pencil of truth."

Yet the line between fact and fancy was never clearly drawn. Through his narrative voice Tufts attempted to impose certainty upon a world of ambiguity, a world he alone had created where meaning was variable, truth contextual, and identity negotiable. Consequently, when examined closely, this imposition proved to be merely another clever performance intended to manipulate an audience. As a narrator, Tufts was no more reliable nor real than he was in any of his other masquerades. Parson Tufts and Narrator Tufts were equally deceptive; without any specific gospel to nurture belief, both spreading the Word and spreading words were equally specious. Yet, as an actor in search of an audience, he wanted readers to appreciate the ingenuity of his masquerades, and his role as a narrator was no exception. Repeatedly, Tufts allowed readers to glimpse the pretences behind his claims of absolute candor. Repeatedly, he revealed—yet refused to recognize—obvious contradictions and inconsistencies. Not only did he appear as a saint one day and pose as a devil the next without acknowledging the remarkable distance between the two, but throughout the narrative he constantly—and humorously—exposed the disparity between words, meaning, and action

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without ever alluding to this most basic incongruity of his narrative performance. Readers, though, at least those who were not so shocked by the sensational material that they could see little else, were allowed to perceive the chaos behind the curtain.

Examples, both large and small, abound. Some are rhetorical, such as the narrator's use of mock heroic. When describing a drunken brawl, for instance, Tufts adopted the elevated language of chivalrous combat.[6] Others are trivial, such as the wrestling episodes. Fairly early in the narrative Tufts, proud of his size and strength, wrestled in several tavern matches, but after breaking one man's arm and injuring another so severely that the man later died, he swore that he never would wrestle again: "such pernicious exercises," he stated, "became my aversion and abhorrence" (108). One hundred pages later, however, having conveniently forgotten the previous pain and problems, he was not so averse to wrestling. Such forgetfulness was also apparent during several of his jailbreaks. During one of his early escapes, for example, he took unfair advantage of a fellow inmate and former partner. Although having previously stated that they were "kindred souls . . . intimately associated," Tufts nevertheless cheated his friend out of every stitch of clothing he had, not only leaving him in jail while he escaped, but also leaving him to freeze in the middle of winter (56). Despite this lesson in dishonor among thieves, Tufts expressed outrage later in the narrative when, while escaping from another jail, a fellow prisoner similarly abused him by "so scurvy a trick" (206).[7]

His experiences as a soldier were equally as contradictory and convoluted. After the Revolution had broken out, Tufts enlisted because he believed that being a soldier was "certainly more honorable" than a thief, "though," he added, "a soldier in fact, may be a thief" (100). And indeed, he served the cause of liberty more by carrying off chickens than he did by carrying a rifle. Nevertheless, he was proud of his military accomplishments and with great enthusiasm described his prowess at stealing food to feed his fellow soldiers. Yet such satisfaction did not stop him from deserting. After two short enlistments, Tufts enlisted a third time, but once he had received his bounty and marched a few miles, he retired from the army. Without any pangs of conscience, he stated: "having now a convenient opportunity for desertion, I made use of the privilege." For readers of the Early Republic, the discrepancy between the word, "privilege," and the action, desertion, was all too obvious.[8]

Perhaps the most outrageous and most obvious of Narrator Tufts's hypocrisies involved his romantic affairs, where inevitably his words and his intentions were separated by a gulf of insincerity. His earliest seduction, for example, set a pattern which he followed throughout his life. Having become enamored by the physical charms of a young woman, he seduced her with promises of marriage, stating, "my discourse as the sugar plum was pleasing to the incredulous miss" (24). Such sugary "discourse," however, held little correspondence with his actual thoughts: "I was averse from all

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thoughts of matrimonial alliance, especially so with the young woman in question, of whose virtue and accomplishments I had not the most exalted opinion" (24). Consequently, when the woman became pregnant, the ardent lover soon disappeared. According to Tufts, who claimed that "lasciviousness . . . was an original ingredient" in his composition, the satisfying of carnal desires, rather than emotional needs, was the primary motive in his relationships. In his pursuit of happiness, physical pleasure was paramount.

Throughout the narrative, Tufts proudly pursued his version of happiness. Shortly after his first affair, he declared his devotion "to sacrifice at the shrine of Venus" whenever possible, and indeed he sacrificed a score of women (26). Perhaps the most sacrificed of all was his first wife, a woman he systematically deserted and revisited over the span of several decades. In fact, because of his frequent returns, Tufts claimed a certain loyalty to his patient wife. His second wife was not so lucky—or unlucky. Despite having a wife and children, Tufts courted and married another young woman with whom he lived for nearly half a year. He finally was unmasked when someone who knew him and knew of his previous marriage happened to learn of his recent nuptials. Fearing violence from his bride's neighbors and relations, Tufts departed without pausing to say goodbye. A decade later, however, he returned, riding a new horse and wearing a new suit of clothes, both of which he had purchased with counterfeit money, and in order to offer some kind of atonement for ruining the woman's reputation, the counterfeit husband offered her fifty of his counterfeit dollars.

Similar examples of empty gestures and false promises occurred at every point of Tufts's life. One of his greatest acts of perfidy took place when he finally was released from prison. In 1793 Tufts had been convicted and condemned for repeated burglaries, but his condemnation was commuted to imprisonment primarily in response to the efforts of his mistress, who ceaselessly petitioned and pleaded in his behalf. Moreover, throughout his five years of imprisonment the woman patiently waited, supporting the children of Tufts's second family. Yet when he regained his liberty in 1798, he abandoned his mistress, preferring to return to his first wife for reasons more material than romantic. After giving up on Tufts and raising their children by herself, his first wife was now living comfortably in Maine, where two of her sons had established prosperous farms. Since it was mid-winter when he was released, Tufts decided to enjoy the warm hospitality of his first family instead of the poverty of his second family. In an incredible twist of rhetoric, the perfidious lover ironically commented on the difficulty he had to control his "passions" as he abandoned his mistress:

> it touched me . . . to think of quitting the woman, who had followed my fortunes . . . and who had attended me so kindly in my greatest afflictions both of body and mind, cheerfully supported my wants to

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> the extent of her ability, when I was deserted by every other person; not to mention that I had four children by her already, and loved her, unquestionably, beyond all other women upon earth. Ah, me! what a stint was it to control my passion on the present occasion? (328)

Because it was mid-winter, ardent passion was no match for a warm hearth.

Tufts cheated or cheated on every woman he courted, but by themselves these examples would serve no other purpose except to document that he was an unsurpassed scoundrel. Such documentation, however, hardly was needed; even the most sympathetic readers would have had little trouble identifying the narrator as debauched and depraved. Consequently, more than simply revealing his corrupt characters, his seductions, deceptions, and betrayals helped to reveal the inadequacies of his narrative performance, inadequacies that the author could not have overlooked. Throughout his life, at least throughout the life he presented readers, Tufts had boasted of his sexual conquests, and both his tone and his lack of conscience heightened the ironic effect of his last affair. After moving to Maine to live with his first wife and sons, Tufts claimed that he reformed, specifically that he stopped stealing, but this reformation did not stop him from stealing away with a neighbor's young daughter. Yet this last relationship was unlike all others in the narrative. Not only was he the one who was seduced, but he also was the one who was deceived and betrayed.

The affair began when Tufts, performing in his role as a doctor, had attended an eighteen-year-old woman from a nearby farm. According to Narrator Tufts, the diligent care he administered to the young woman "made no slight impression on her heart" (345). The fifty-two-year-old reprobate, however, decided not to fan this "fatal flame" and stopped visiting his patient, avoiding "all possible occasions for personal intercourse" (346). But once recovered, the young woman took it upon herself to find an appropriate occasion for "personal intercourse," and "in plain terms" she stated that, in gratitude, she would give anything to "her greatest benefactor": "Yes, Mr. Tufts, to speak ingenuously, in nothing could I receive so much satisfaction, such peculiar delight, as in devoting my all to your only service" (346). Forgetting all previous vows of reform and restraint, Tufts gave the young woman "satisfaction" by accepting her "all," and in consequence of their concord the two decided to run away.

Their journey was not uneventful. On the second day out, Tufts, after stopping to dispense some medical advice, rode on only to suddenly discover his young mistress in highly suspicious circumstances with a strange man. Forgetting that he often had played similar tricks, Tufts declared "demon jealously had taken hold of my imagination, and fired it with indignant rage" (351). After a melodramatic confrontation, full of tears, threats, denials, confessions, and promises, Tufts forgave his wayward mistress, despite the fact that she admitted having traded her physical charms for "pecuniary allurements" (352). Harmony, however, was not long

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maintained. While travelling about dispensing his counterfeit cures, Tufts returned to the tavern where he and his lover were staying, only to discover her locked in embrace with yet another man, an "Irish schoolmaster" no less (354). More abashed than outraged, the cuckolded Tufts commented: "I was convinced, beyond a doubt, that lasciviousness was, indeed, her constitutional and incurable failing. . . . I was resolved to place, henceforth, no manner of confidence in her delusive professions or fair speeches, repenting egregiously, that I had been so unwise as to leave my own family" (355). After another tearful confrontation, in which he accused his young companion of a "libidinous propensity," Tufts resumed his errant journey, only to have it soon ended when the young woman's father burst in upon their bedroom. Having heard news where Tufts and his daughter were staying, the outraged father tracked them to a tavern in Hanover, New Hampshire, where, after catching them in bed, he attacked the profligate pair with a club. Beaten with the most phallic of symbols, Tufts was rendered impotent by the father's rage.

Throughout these final misadventures, Narrator Tufts never once acknowledged the ironic correspondences and obvious contradictions. When he accused his eighteen-year-old mistress of "constitutional lasciviousness," he conveniently forgot that, when he was the same age, he had admitted "lasciviousness" was an "original ingredient" in his own constitution. Nor did he recall the many instances in which he had seduced another man's wife, mistress, or daughter. Few people ever have had less reason to express indignation at another's infidelity, and fewer still have been less injured. As a narrator, Tufts was far more amusing than he was convincing when venting his jealousy. In fact, if there was any justice in the narrative, it was evident in unfaithful lover's faithless mistress, but this conspicuous irony was overlooked as well. Dedicated to her own pursuit of pleasure, Tufts's young mistress was nothing more than a female version of himself, but the narrator saw no resemblances. And while he remained oblivious to the most amusing paradoxes and hypocrisies of his narrative, he continually presented them to his readers, thus creating not only two viewpoints but also two realms of narrative experience.

In presenting his life, in selecting and arranging his experiences for readers of the Early Republic, Tufts was rarely reliable or consistent. The disparate distance between his rhetoric and his actions was apparent in all of his descriptions, and in his concluding chapter this discrepancy was brought to a comic culmination. After being caught in flagrante delicto by his mistress's father, Tufts once more returned to his first wife and, according to the narrative, retired from all vice: "Since that period [his journey into cuckoldom] I have carried my dish pretty uprightly; have been guilty of few or no misdemeanors but have persevered heroically in regular habits and virtuous resolutions" (363). Although readers might have overlooked the relativity of the "few or no misdemeanors" that were, or were not, spilled from his nearly upright dish, no one would have missed the incongruity of

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his claim to heroism in the face of "regular habits," nor would they have failed to perceive the equal incongruity of heroic perseverance through the hazards of "virtuous resolutions." Empty rhetoric—humorous, but empty. And when offering the traditional final warning, Tufts proved to be similarly deceptive: "Should any of the rising generation, by a perusal of my story, learn to avoid those quicksands of vice, on which I have been wrecked, I shall feel myself amply compensated for the trouble I have taken in its compilation" (365). What "quicksands of vice," and where was the wreck of his life? According to his own statements, only pages previous, he was living in fairly comfortable, fairly happy circumstances. Although he claimed that his "iniquities have been regularly visited with pain, poverty and stripes," his life did not exactly illustrate either providential justice or inexorable punishment. Moreover, his tone throughout the narrative had been more self-flattering than self-effacing, less repentant than impudent.[10] Tufts stated that he "taught virtue, by the practice of vice," but this statement did not fit his life, where the only thing "virtuous" had been a handful of "resolutions." More retired than reformed, he in fact challenged the whole concept of Providence, where inevitably rewards followed virtue and punishment followed iniquity. Life, at least the life he described, was never so simple; deserving and receiving rarely, if ever, corresponded, and actions and consequences rarely, rather than inevitably, correlated. Consequently, by nearly renouncing vice and by heroically persevering in nothing more than resolutions, Tufts demonstrated the conventions—and not the conviction—of his reform.

Narrator Tufts himself was an empty convention, a narrative performance created for the benefit of readers, and the frequency of his contradictions and inconsistencies should be seen as part of this performance. The narrator's missteps were intentional and served two functions. First, by stating one thing and doing another, by insisting on the inconstancy of all bonds, oaths, and relationships, and by assigning value and meaning according to context, Tufts reinforced his theme of relative truth. When the validity of different, even antithetical perspectives was recognized, then the sinner did not contradict the saint. Second, his unreliability as a narrator drew attention to his narrative performance, allowing readers to better appreciate his rhetorical acrobatics. The narrative was not published as just another crude criminal confession, but as a sophisticated literary performance, and ultimately the author wanted readers to esteem the difference.

Despite his claims to truth, Narrator Tufts had not been truthful; in fact, he was not even the narrator. The Tufts who posed and performed, dissembled and deceived, was not a personality, but a character, a carefully crafted rhetorical device intended to shock and entertain readers. And those readers not taken in by the literary sleights of hand would have perceived the distance between the character and the narrator. Early in the narrative, Tufts claimed that he received no education, and indeed the historical Tufts, the one which exists today in a few legal records, was only

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semi-literate at best.[11] The fact that he could not possibly have written his narrative, however, was not hidden from readers; rather, the title page stated "in substance, as compiled from his own mouth." In order to exist in print, Tufts relied on a ghostwriter, whose literary skills fashioned the historical thief's character, and throughout the narrative the narrator drew attention to his knowledge of literature, including to recent works of fiction, knowledge which the thief would have little or no access to.[12] Ironically, when comparing his narrative voice to both Fanny Burney and Lawrence Sterne, the narrator stated: "The reader, is no doubt, fatigued and disgusted at the continual repetition of those intrusive little pronouns, *I, me,* and *my*" (224). Readers, at least those who could read beyond the level of sensational titillation, might have wondered who was speaking.

Narrator Tufts's final irony was that, in establishing the sovereignty of self, he demonstrated that there was no self, merely moments of self-dramatization. Narrator Tufts was no more, or less, real than Preacher Tufts. The difference between genuine and counterfeit was distinguished by belief of others. An individual's effect on people, and not his or her substance, created identity. For those people who damned and even burned the book because of its irreverence, Narrator Tufts was taken at his word, his claims to candor were believed. For those who peeked behind the pose, however, even greater (and more amusing) irreverences were apparent. The Tufts who claimed to have worn "no mask, no disguises" revealed himself to be a consummate master of deception, and the "every day dress" he claimed to have appeared in was no more visible than the emperor's clothes. In drawing his life with "the pencil of truth," he erased and smudged the outlines of his identity, offering readers an impression rather than a portrait. Ultimately, narration was simply another branch to be experimented with in "the science of deception." In order to wear a mask of contrition, Narrator Tufts had declared that he would offer truth as an "atonement," but since there was no one behind the mask, nothing was atoned.

Henry Tufts, the actual thief, had wanted an audience. His experiences had taught him that truth was relative, that what was believed was more important than what was real, and he knew well that belief could be created and then manipulated through performance. By narrating his story, he declared his sovereignty of self; by selecting and arranging his life for literary presentation, he asserted the validity of his pretensions, and by asserting he became. According to the standard truths of his society, he was an illiterate thief, a social outcast of inferior status. The ideology of the social elite persistently ignored the smudged pencil lines between right and wrong, good and bad, truth and falsehood, and according to this hegemony of absolute values, a thief was just a thief, nothing more. Early in his life, however, Tufts had rejected his lack of status, refusing to accept the limitations of low birth and little education. Adopting the rhetoric of the Revolution, he replaced his providential role as a semi-literate laborer with that of

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a thief, a role which allowed him to pass through a variety of social and professional boundaries, and from his trespasses he learned that human distinctions were perceived, not ordained.

Tufts refused to accept the inherence of such labels as thief and scoundrel, and by fulfilling the expectations of his audiences he demonstrated that he could become whatever he set out to be. Regardless of his role, he revealed that belief was a creative force. In order to be as he perceived himself to be, he required the belief of an audience to breathe life into his creation of self. By directing other perceptions into his perspectives, he not only altered the context, and thus the degree, of his social condemnation, but he also sanctioned his pretensions. And so it was with writing. Authorship and the literary world which surrounded it were forbidden property, more sacred territory belonging to the social elite, but in order to validate his previous performances, he disregarded these boundaries. For Tufts, who defiantly believed that his life was worth a book, the act of writing was his ultimate performance, his final masquerade. Seizing the conventions of a literary life, he recreated himself in dialogic response to the prevailing views of his social environment.[13] With the help of his clever ghostwriter, he reshaped the materials of his past into a rogue's history, and thus used the laughter of readers to diminish the social damnation that he had endured as a common criminal. Regardless of the irony in his narrative pose, writing gave the upstart thief an aura of legitimacy that he never could have achieved in life. By assuming both the status and title of an author, he placed himself on privileged ground in such a way that he could never be run off. The book replaced the man.

The book, however, was too shocking to gain much of an audience. For many readers accustomed to the conventions of polite literature, Tufts's greatest crime was his theft of authorship. Although his narrative performance succeeded for a short time on a popular level, it proved too scandalous for the sensibilities of most readers. Most were offended by its sacrileges and seductions, and many damned the book without bothering to read it.[14] Yet his literary trespassing caused as much indignation as his criminal trespasses. In a life devoted to outrage, the narrative was yet another act of defiance; with the help of his ghostwriter, Tufts disdained both literary laws and social customs, and in doing so he challenged the ideological assumptions of Early Republic readers. In trying to establish the validity of his pretensions, he undermined their perspectives, destabilizing the hegemony of their values.[15] Tufts's worst offenses were not that he stole and swindled, but that, while posing as an author, he erased the lines that previously had separated high and low, sacred and profane. In his attempt to demonstrate the cleverness of his various performances, he exposed the debility of the truths held in common by his readers, or at least those readers who collectively controlled the literary marketplace. Outraged by his pretensions as well as by his crimes, those who had appointed themselves as cultural critics and judges convicted Tufts of

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literary assault and sentenced both him and his book to obscurity. In refusing to recognize the merits of book and the validity of its literary status, these cultural arbitrators indirectly insisted that their values were intrinsic. In banishing both thief and book, they were preserving their beliefs that truth and identity were absolute, that actions and consequences were logically linked, that virtue was rewarded and vice punished, and that their world was an orderly, coherent place. They condemned Tufts not just because he, a sinner, posed as a saint, but because he revealed that there was no difference between them. Now that the massive doors of the canon have been swung open, perhaps the literary sentence that banished Tufts and his book will be overturned, and readers will allow the two the opportunity to return.

Notes

[1] Henry Tufts, *A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, Travels and Sufferings of Henry Tufts* (Dover, NH: Samuel Bragg, 1807) 240. All further quotations from Tufts will be taken from the original 1807 edition. Despite its initial success on a popular level, the book failed to gain an extended readership. Yet the book was not completely forgotten. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, for example, published an essay admiring the literary and historical virtues of Tufts's vices: "A New England Vagabond," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 76 (1888): 605-11. Also, Edmond Pearson published an edited version of the narrative and included a helpful introduction and appendix: *The Autobiography of a Criminal* (New York: Duffield, 1930). I am indebted to Pearson's work, as he was the first person to explore the differences between the literary character and the historical figure. For the only recent examinations of Tufts, see Daniel E. Williams, "Doctor, Preacher, Soldier, Thief," *Early American Literature* 19 (1984): 3-20 and "Gadding About Quack Like," *The Body and The Text: Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Wendell Aycock (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 1990) 77-89.

[2] Tufts was not alone in presenting readers with scenes of seduction. In his pursuit of women, he actually resembled the villains in numerous sentimental novels. The biggest difference, however, was that he not only presented his side of the story as the male aggressor, but also that he justified his seductions as merely another form of socio-economic competition. Equally important, Tufts narrated his pursuit of sexual adventure in a humorous tone, a strategy that encouraged laughter rather than censure and at the same time reduced the seriousness of his offenses. For a valuable discussion of the seduction motif in early American novels, see Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986).

[3] The criminal narrative genre was already well established in England as New England was being settled. By the late seventeenth century, New England ministers, such as both Increase and Cotton Mather, adopted and adapted this genre as jeremiads against declension. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the tradition had evolved from crude warnings of divine judgment to sophisticated exhortations to conversion. Part of the evangelical movement, criminal confessions illustrated the process of repentance and redemption, whereby condemned criminals approached the scaffold renouncing their wickedness and surrendering themselves to God (and as well to ministers and magistrates). These conventions of confessional penitence began to break down during the last half of the eighteenth century as criminal characters still approached death repenting their crimes. Influenced in part by both Franklin's *Autobiography* and Burroughs's *Memoirs*, the Tufts text was the first full length criminal narrative clearly to subvert the conventions of confession. For a discussion of the criminal narrative genre, see Daniel E. Williams, "Rogues, Rascals, and Scoundrels: The Underworld Literature of Early America," *American Studies* 24 (1983): 5-19 and "Behold a Tragic Scene Changed into a Theater of Mercy: The Structure and Significance of Criminal Conversion Narratives in Early New

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England," *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 827-47. For a discussion of confession in literature, see Terence Doody, *Confession and Community in the Novel* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980).

[4] Tufts's ability to manipulate belief places him at the front of a long line of American tricksters who cultivated appearances and performances for the sake of audiences. Exploiting the lack of stable social foundations in the Early Republic, he and others like him pursued self-interest by cultivating the expectations of those around them. According to Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence Man in American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982), such trading of promises was not only "the central transaction in a confidence game" but also "the definitive New World transaction" (6). In addition to Lindberg's fine discussion of American con men, see Susan Kuhlman, *Knave, Fool, and Genius: The Confidence Man as He Appears in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1973), Wendy Martin, "The Rogue and the Rational Man: Hugh Henry Brackenridge's Study of a Con Man in *Modern Chivalry*," *Early American Literature* 8 (1973): 177-92, and Warwick Wadlington, *The Confidence Game in American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975). For a helpful analysis of literary responses to authority in the Early Republic, see Davidson, Emory Elliott, *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic 1725-1810* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982), and Mark R. Patterson, *Authority, Autonomy, and Representation in American Literature, 1776-1865* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988). For a valuable analysis of changing attitudes towards patriarchal authority during this period, see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982). For an equally perceptive discussion of eighteenth-century America's "quest for legitimacy," see Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

[5] By itself, the American Revolution did not revolutionize American society; nevertheless, it accelerated and heightened changes already occurring in significant areas of social experience, allowing far greater choices and opportunities. For the best discussions of social instability and geographic mobility in the Early Republic, see James A. Henretta, *The Revolution of American Society, 1700-1815* (New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1973) and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

[6] For a good example of Tufts's use of mock heroic, see his description of the drunken brawl. Despite alluding to the "undaunted heroism on both sides," Tufts explained how he "marched off triumphantly to the nearest thickets," where he hid until the tumult was over (26).

[7] As Pearson first noted, these two incidents create an obvious contrast, as both involved a stolen suit of clothes. In the former, Tufts duped his gullible companion out of every stitch of the man's clothing, leaving him to shiver in a frozen jail cell, and justified the abuse as a necessity. Since it was winter, he stated that "in all likelihood . . .[he would] need" the extra clothing (59). In the latter incident, Tufts was cheated out of "a suit of spare clothes" by a fellow prisoner during another jailbreak. With delightful inconsistency, he declared his indignation by referring to "that old adage, 'honor among thieves'" (206).

[8] The ironic distance between righteous words and unrighteous actions was similarly evident when Tufts, as a prisoner on Castle Island, adopted the Revolutionary rhetoric of liberty to express his desire for freedom. Referring to his imprisonment as "my present slavery" and to freedom as "a delicious dream," he composed a Fourth of July ode celebrating liberty and then patriotically attempted to secure his own liberty by escaping. Moreover, despite having deserted the Revolutionary cause, Tufts composed a eulogy honoring the memory of George Washington as "Freedom's favorite son" (334).

[9] According to John DeMilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), Tufts was not alone in his unending quest for sexual pleasure. As the patriarchal family structure began to move beyond to break down during the Enlightenment, and as sexual practice began to move beyond the family sphere, physical pleasure no longer was viewed as strictly the byproduct of procreation. Sexual fulfillment became part of the individual's more general pursuit of happiness. Yet Tufts's ardor was remarkable in that it was totally removed from all social responsibility, and such libertinism normally was practiced only by a small group of elite males against non-elite females. Through seduction, then, Tufts defied both moral and class codes.

[10] The Tufts narrative completely subverted the conventions of the criminal genre, shocking readers not only with content but with tone and perspective. Regardless of how sensational or

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defiant they were in real life, criminals generally were characterized as approaching death denying all the vanities of self, and as part of the redemption process, self-loathing was expected. The narration of life, then, became a necessary act of humiliation. Despite his pretences, Tufts adopted the opposite tone, affirming, rather than renouncing, his vanities. Even when humiliated by his mistress's father, he refused to be humbled.

[11] For an amusing example of Tufts's writing, see his petition for clemency, located in Pearson, 355.

[12] The identity of Tufts's ghostwriter remains unknown. In his *Notable Events in the History of Dover* (Dover, NH: n.p., 1913), George Wadleigh stated that the narrative was "written by Major Thomas Tash of New Durham, from Tufts [sic] dictation" (185). While examining the New York Public Library copy, Pearson found a penciled note also stating that Tash was the author. Mary P. Thompson, however, in her *Landmarks in Ancient Dover* (Dover, NH: Concord Republican Press, 1892), reported that the narrative was "written by a clever young lawyer of Dover" because "that brave Revolutionary officer [Tash] was far better qualified to handle the sword than the pen" (257). Although his actual identity remains unknown, the ghostwriter indirectly identified himself through his writing and references. He was remarkably well read, indicating a privileged position in society and possibly a background in law (which also might explain his interest in Tufts). He not only made reference to a broad range of English and American literature, but also indicated a knowledge of recent literary developments. Although anonymous, the ghostwriter was no mere amanuensis, but as a collaborator who creatively shaped the actual thief into a picaresque hero.

[13] According to Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981), all utterance is dialogic in that it results from an interactive process. Language is a field of ideological contention where both meaning and identity are formed (and are being constantly reformed) through oppositions. While I do not wish to argue that Tufts's narrative is any sort of Bakhtinian urtext, I do find that both colonial rogue and Soviet critic shared a belief in the contexuality of the self. Both generally believed that personality was neither internal nor absolute but produced (and reproduced) through a complex series of shifting social interrelationships. Certainly Tufts presented his literary self in defiant response to the conventional assumptions, he demonstrated the relativity of his identity. For a discussion of the dialogical nature of language, see Bakhtin's "Discourse and the Novel."

[14] For a good example of the literary outrage that resulted from Tufts's narrative, see Mary P. Thompson's response in her local history. According to Thompson, the name Tufts came to represent "superlative wickedness"; she wrote that "the bucolic imagination of this region (Dover, NH) could take no farther flight in the line of total depravity [than in Tufts and his book]." Yet in the same sentence in which she called the narrative "pernicious," Thompson indicated that she had not read it (257).

[15] In his excellent study, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983), Lennard J. Davis described English criminal narratives as having a "double discourse"; at the same time narratives sensationally depicted criminal and sinful behavior, they also situated the criminal character in a punitive and redemptive process. Literary reflections of criminal life not only presented examples of defiance, but also performed a "constraining social function" by authorizing the sacred and secular powers of repression (127). While most American narratives equally display this "double discourse," Tufts's narrative did not. The most obvious difference was that he neither literally nor symbolically offered his life as a scaffold confession; unlike most criminal narratives, the context of execution did not transform him into "a speaker of [conventional] truth" (126). Consequently, his interactions with civil authorities in no way reinforced established positions of power. In describing his life, the Tufts narrator ironically thwarted the reader's expectation that he would end by affirming the systems of authority he had earlier defied. For a fuller discussion of the moral conventions in criminal narratives, see Davis's chapter, "Criminality and the Double Discourse."

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